

The grand narratives of modernity and the modern self: The Protestant Idea of the Soul and the Educationalization of the World

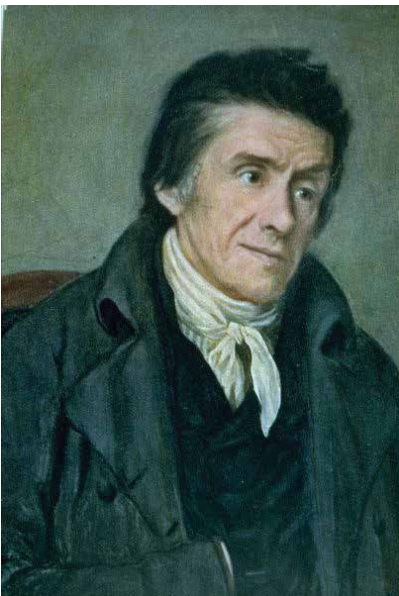
DANIEL TRÖHLER, Professor of Education Sciences, University of Luxembourg

Today it seems almost natural to assign perceived social problems to education. When, for instance, the United States of America saw their nation and the Western world at risk after the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957, it educationalized the Cold War by passing the very first national education law, the *National Defense Education Act* in 1958, expressing the view that “Education is the First Line of Defense” (Rickover, 1959). And when, a few years later, the environment had become an affair of public concern, for instance triggered by the book *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962), endangered nature became educationalized, as expressed for instance in the *Journal of Environmental Education* (1969) and in educational trails teaching walkers about nature. And when again a few years later in the United States the national crises after the Vietnam War, the oil crises in the 1970s, and the near collapse of the automobile industry in the early 1980s led to the perception of *A Nation at Risk* and the conclusion of an *Imperative For Educational Reform*, this expressed the educationalization of economy and economic policy. A rising teenage pregnancy rate in the 1960s led to an educationalization of sex through the introduction of sex education in schools, which gained new urgency with the outbreak of HIV / AIDS in the 1980s. Museums were made more attractive by the invention of museum education around 1990. And when immigrant adolescents in the suburbs of Paris and Lyon protested violently in 2005, their behavior was not seen as a reaction to their poor living conditions or poor life chances but as an expression of the wrong education, as France’s Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin stated in 2005. Human life is a site of what UNESCO has called ‘lifelong learning’ and propagated since 1962, a phenomenon that was critically noticed (and explicitly labeled “educationalization”) as early as in 1929 (Fischer, 1929, p. 286).

Up to the mid-18th century, it was not at all ‘natural’ to interpret perceived problems educationally — that is, to assign the solving of problems to educational practice. The general thesis in the emergence of such a cultural shift is that the Protestant interpretation of the soul became something like the safe haven in a time when major shifts occurred that may have been advocated, but that most of all also made people fundamentally uncertain. This was the time around 1700, when people changed to think about two fundamental things in interpreting their own lives: first, in France, in the ‘quarrel of the Ancients and



Martin Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder



Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Painter was probably F.G.A. Schöner.

the Moderns' and open-end idea of history and development replaced the idea of an eternal cycle of events, and second, in England, when the older idea of a strict separation between the world of economy and the world of politics became obsolete by the fact that rich people could, via the Bank of England, founded in 1694, to invest in government, transforming politics into something of economical interest and profit (Hirschman, 1977).

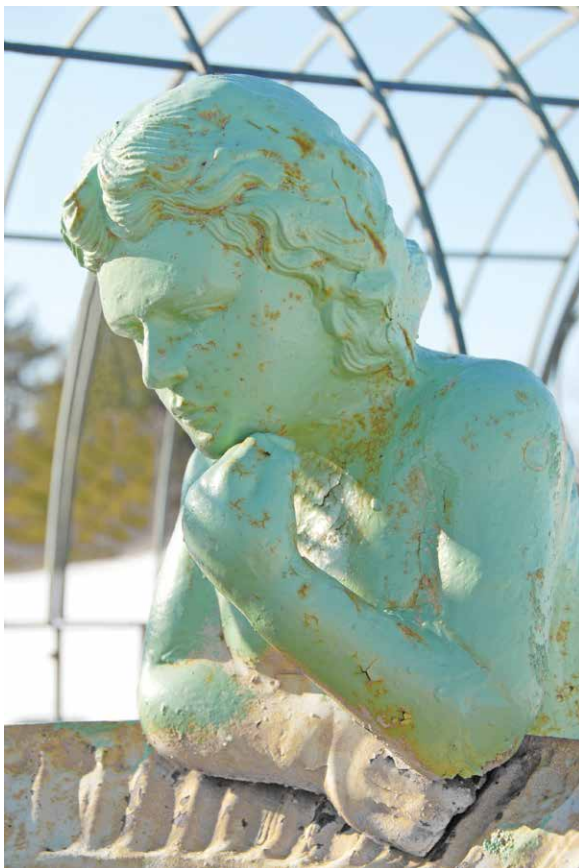
The idea of an open future and of the economization of politics were, for different reasons to different people, attractive but at the same time threatening; the French Revolution was, after all, a result of these transformation, fascinating and worrying. Different anti-capitalist ideals were fostered, and especially in education, and with good reason: Protestantism—withstanding its different denominations—had turned from the Catholic emphasis on the institution (the Holy Mother Church) to the individual's soul as the instance of salvation, with no fundamental need of consecrated mediators (priests) between God and the individual. This Protestant understanding of the individual's soul became the 'solution' to the problem of open progress and moral challenge of a capitalist society. The idea was to educationally strengthen the soul of the children in order to master the challenges of an undefined future and capitalist society. In that sense the educationalization of social problems, as indicated exemplarily at the beginning, are simply of examples of an educationalized world, representing thus a key concept for understanding and deciphering the grand narratives of modernity and the modern self.

However, there were two different ways of Protestant anti-capitalist idea(l)s. In the reformed Protestant parts of Europe the idea was the ancient republican virtuous citizen-soldier with the only passion of the common good of his fatherland, and in the Lutheran parts of Europe it was the holistic-corporatist ideal of the *Ganze Haus* ('entire house'), combining different generations of masters and servants into a whole unit. Whereas the educational ideal of the former was mostly developed in Switzerland, with the overall hero Pestalozzi (Tröhler, 2013), attempting to educate holistically a virtuous future citizen able to transform the world into a virtuous republic, the later ideal refrained—in the context of the Luther's dualism—from political consequences. The ideal was thus less the strong than the beautiful soul expressed in the notion of *Bildung* (Horlacher, 2016).

Bildung is the aesthetic harmony defined as a means of the true education of the human mind. "The true purpose of man—not the one changing inclinations prescribe, but the eternally unchanging reason—is the highest and harmonious *Bildung* of his powers to one whole", Humboldt said (Humboldt, 1792/1960, p. 64), and: "Perfection is not limited (Humboldt, 1797/1960, p. 512) and represents the "inward spiritual vitality" (p. 513). But "*Bildung*," Humboldt says, is only to be found "in one self" (p. 507), whereby this spiritual inwardness was defined, for instance by Kant, as "invisible church", "the mere idea of the union of all upright human beings under direct and moral divine world-governance" (Kant 1793/1996, pp. 135). The idea of the "invisible church"—*ecclesia invisibilis*—lies in the center of the a-political but cosmopolitan Lutheran Protestantism, and it had been advocated already by Luther (based on this reading of St. Augustine) in his treaty against

Papacy in Rome, whereby the invisibility was understood as “spiritual” (*geistlich*) and inwardly (*innerlich*): “Then what one believes, one does not see or feel, in turn, what one sees or feels, one does not believe” (Luther, 1520, quoted in Manole, 2004, p. 49).

It is obvious that not the Lutheran ideal, limited to Germany and the Nordic countries in Europe, became dominant in the course of the history, but the idea of enabling and strengthening the soul in order to cope morally with the challenges of the world, whereby the success of dealing with the challenges seems to have lost the moral impetus in taming the capitalist world. It might be called an irony that those people feeling alienated through these developments do no often refer to *Bildung*, but in any case the critique is still within the frame of an educationalized world, that seems to have found its favorite pastime with reforming education in order to erect the kingdom of God on earth.



Interruption and Patination by Alan Wilkinson, Queen's Faculty of Education

REFERENCES

- Carson, R. (1962). *Silent spring*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett.
- Fischer, A. (1929). Germany. In *Educational yearbook of the international institute of Teachers College Columbia University* 6, <https://www.tcrecord.org/edyearbook/Content.asp?ContentId=14761>
- Hirschman, A. O. (1977). *The passions and the interests: Political arguments for capitalism before its triumph*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Horlacher, R. (2016). *The Educated Subject and the German Concept of Bildung. A Comparative Cultural History*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Humboldt, W. v. (1792/1960). Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen. In: *Wilhelm von Humboldt. Werke in fünf Bänden. Band I* (pp. 56-233). Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Humboldt, W. v. (1797/1960). Über den Geist der Menschheit. In: *Wilhelm von Humboldt. Werke in fünf Bänden. Band I* (pp. 506-518). Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Kant, I (1793/1996). Religion within the boundaries of mere reason. In: *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant—Religion and Rational Theology* (39-216). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Manole, N. (2004). *Ekklesiologische Perspektiven im Dialog zwischen den orthodoxen und reformatorischen Kirchen*. Münster, Germany: Lit Verlag.
- Pocock, J. G. A. (1975). *The Machiavellian moment. Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rickover, G. H. (1959). *Education and Freedom*. New York, NY: Dutton & Co.
- Tröhler, D. (2013). *Pestalozzi and the educationalization of the world*. New York, NY: Palgrave Pivot.